Fighting the Soviet Imperialists: The Mujaheddin in Afghanistan

Poorly armed but highly courageous, Afghanistan's "holy warriors" have refused to bow before the awesome military might of the Soviet Union.

JACK WHEELER | FROM THE SEPTEMBER 1984 ISSUE

I am drinking tea in a flower garden. Veiled women carrying jars of water on their heads glide silently by. Turbaned men are tending their fields and irrigation ditches. Among the walnut and apple trees and in the marijuana patches, children are laughing and playing. Flowers are planted everywhere, even in the window sill of a nearby home, one wall of which has a huge hole in it fashioned by a Soviet artillery shell. Beautiful white puffy clouds are building over the mountains, and a gorgeous sunset is developing. A caravan of camels plods insouciantly along, bound for the Pakistan border, each burdened with a load of roughhewn timbers.

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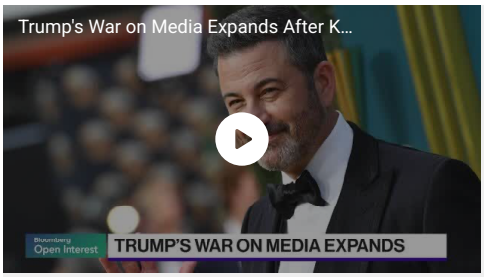

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The village I am in is nestled in the foothills of the valley of Jaji (georgegee), Afghanistan, and in the center of the valley floor below me is a fortress under siege, with 1,200 Soviet and Afghan communist soldiers inside. I am drinking tea in a flower garden, watching a war.

In the mountains above and around me, the incessant bursts of DShK ("Dashaka") machine-gun fire and thuds of mortar rounds are in eerie contrast with the laughter of the playing children, who have become inured and oblivious to the sounds of warfare. Small clouds of dust appear whenever a mortar round lands near the Soviet garrison. Tracer bullets from the Dashakas make fluorescent pink arcs across the sky and are answered by returning Dashaka fire from the fortress. Periodically, a Soviet howitzer cuts loose from within the beleaguered fort, and the shell lands with an ear-shattering blast that makes the entire valley rumble and shudder.

Earlier in the day, I had been in the mountains, at one of the Dashaka positions firing upon the fort. Just five minutes after I left, a howitzer shell scored a direct hit on the position, and everyone was killed.

In the mountains on either side of the valley there are 30 Dashaka emplacements. Such a concentration of precious firepower is directed at the garrison, because it lies directly athwart the main arms-smuggling trail from the Pakistan border to the capital city of Kabul and all of northern Afghanistan. A dense mine field surrounding the fort prevents its being overrun, but a counter-mine field along all access roads prevents its being supplied or rescued by ground. The water supply to the fort has been poisoned. Inside the fort, food and ammunition are running low, and the only way the Soviets can resupply their desperate countrymen is by helicopter.

But the Dashakas in the mountains prevent the helicopters from landing: the choppers must fly very high and attempt to drop the supplies into the fort. More often than not, they miss. I watch as a load carrying dozens of loaves of bread and 300 mortar shells lands in a gully beyond the minefield perimeter. A small band of turbaned and pajamaed men quickly scurry up to retrieve it.

These scurrying men, the men operating the Dashakas in the mountains, the men with whom I am drinking tea in the garden, are Afghan *mujaheddin*—"holy warriors" fighting a *jihad,* an Islamic holy war, against the Soviet invaders of their country. Often barefoot or in sandals, armed mostly with single-shot bolt-action carbines and a handful of larger weapons, they are the only people in the world who are fighting the Soviet Union face on. Straight up against the awesome might of the Red Army, the Afghan mujaheddin have fought the invading Soviets to a standstill.

But the cost of such a fight to the Afghan people and freedom fighters is reaching genocidal proportions. Since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, at least 50,000, and perhaps even 100,000, mujaheddin have died in combat. Some 800,000 Afghan civilians—mostly women and children—have been killed, reports Freedom House, the human-rights-monitoring organization. Aerial attacks by Soviet MI-24 HIND helicopter gunships and MiG jet fighters are responsible for the great majority of these deaths. While the villages of Jaji are somewhat protected from air attack by all the Dashakas, most other Afghan villages are not nearly so fortunate.

(Many statistics regarding the Soviets' war on Afghanistan vary widely from source to source, and because of the obvious problems of verification, most are simply estimates. Those that I report throughout this writing seem most credible to me, after having weighed them against my own observations from two trips inside Afghanistan in August 1983 and conversations and interviews with other journalists, up-close observers, contacts within the intelligence communities of several nations, and many mujaheddin.)

According to present estimates, out of a total Afghan population of 15 million, some 3.5 million are refugees in Pakistan; 1.5 million, in Iran. And because the Soviets have bombed virtually all Afghan villages—some 14,000—incinerating their fields and harvests with napalm, probably another one to two million "internal refugees" have been forced to flee their villages to larger cities, particularly to Kabul, the capital. Thus, close to half of the country's people are refugees.

Starvation is becoming widespread as the Soviets pursue their policy of what Princeton University's Louis Dupree, the premier scholar on Afghanistan, has called "migratory genocide." Under this policy, the Soviet invaders go after civilians, not the guerrillas, and thereby prevent the latter from "swimming like fish in the sea" of the rural population—Mao Tse Tung's prerequisite for the survival of a guerrilla army.

Moscow, it is often said, cares nothing for Afghans, only for Afghanistan, the physical territory itself—250,000 mountainous and arid square miles (about the size of Texas) landlocked between Iran, Pakistan, and the USSR. Today, Soviet administrators are wholly in charge of every department of the "Afghan government." In fact, Moscow is well on its way toward incorporating Afghanistan within the USSR itself. (Moscow has already evacuated the Wakhan Corridor, in northeast Afghanistan, having turned it into a huge military base.) And the Soviets seem fully willing to slaughter every single man, woman, and child in the entire country, if necessary, in order to do so.

But in trying to subdue Afghanistan, the Soviets may well be playing a game of Russian roulette. Almost 20 years ago, Louis Dupree predicted, "If you want to kill the Soviet Union, get it to try to eat Afghanistan." After going inside the country twice with the mujaheddin, and personally witnessing the spirit and courage of the Afghan people, I think there is a chance he may be proven right.

With a glance at a world map and a perusal of a historical atlas, one can quickly grasp that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan is the latest move in the Russian-Soviet imperial march toward the Indian Ocean. The next move is Baluchistan, the Baluchi tribal area south of Afghanistan along the Iran-Pakistan border. Soviet agents have been organizing and agitating among the Baluchis for decades—and it is no accident that today some 2,000 Baluchis are students at Afghanistan's Kabul University, where the faculty is primarily Soviet, most of the Afghan teachers having fled the country or joined the mujaheddin.

In the 19th century the land west of the Indus River was "Apache country" for British India, a wild frontier peopled with fiercely independent Moslem tribes, mostly Pathans. A century ago, British readers thrilled to Thomas Mundy's *King of the Khyber Rifles* and Rudyard Kipling's *Barrack Room Ballads,* aware that the heroic struggle between the Pathan *lashkars* (tribal armies) and regiments of the British Raj was part of the "Great Game" between the imperial powers of Czarist Russia and Victorian England. As Russia advanced across Central Asia, violently subduing the formerly sovereign Islamic emirates and khanates—Bukhara in 1866, Samarkand in 1868, Kokand in 1876, Merv in 1884—the mountains of the Hindu Kush, Afghanistan's backbone, became the British Raj's last barrier between the Russians and the plains of India. Sir Thomas Holdich observed of his fellow English at the turn of the century, "We have contributed much to give a national unity to that nebulous community which we call Afghanistan, by drawing a boundary all round it and elevating it into the position of a buffer state between ourselves and Russia."

The actual formation of this buffer state, however, was accomplished by a remarkable Pathan prince, Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, behind whom the British threw their support. Beginning as ruler of Kabul in 1880, Abdur Rahman initiated a series of military campaigns that, by 1896, had stitched together a welter of independent ethnic and linguistic groups to create the modern nation-state of Afghanistan.

In 1891, Russia tried to seize the Wakhan region, in northeast Afghanistan (it would finally succeed 90 years later). With an Anglo-Russian war the alternative to a negotiated solution, Britain acknowledged Russian sovereignty to all land north of the Amu Darya (Oxus River, which forms the Soviet-Afghan border), while Russia acknowledged Afghan sovereignty over the Wakhan and areas south of the Amu Darya.

After the 1917 Bolshevik revolution in Russia, Moscow lost that recently acquired sovereignty. Just as Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland, Belorussia, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan all proclaimed their political independence from Moscow, so did the khanates of Bukhara and Khiva. Over the next five years, nationalist revolts broke out throughout what had been Russian Turkestan. The most famous of these revolts was Enver Pasha's *basmachi* movement. But with massive and brutal force, the Red Army crushed all of these attempts at liberation from Great Russian-Soviet Communist domination. Enver Pasha was killed in 1922, and although bands of *basmachi* continued fighting into the 1930s, by the middle of the '20s Moscow had again gained control of all of its former territory north of the Oxus River.

The Afghan government in Kabul developed a relationship with the Kremlin of arm's-length civility and peaceful trade. This lasted up to and beyond World War II, during which the Afghans adopted a neutral position of *bi-tarafi* (Dari Afghan for "without sides") regarding the Allies and the Axis powers. *Bi-tarafi* continued to be the official policy throughout the Cold War, as the Soviets and the Americans competed in expanding trade and offering foreign aid. Yet King Mohammed Zahir Shah, who had ruled since 1933, while being very careful to remain on good terms with Moscow, was known to be more at ease with the West.

The Soviets had given the king good cause to be wary. In 1946 Moscow forced his government to cede to the USSR an area of 1,000 square miles known as Kushka. And from the end of World War II to 1949, small teams of Soviet *agents provocateurs* slipped across the border: Soviet Tadjiks agitating among Afghan Tadjiks, Soviet Uzbeks among Afghan Uzbeks, and so on. But the Afghans proceeded to turn in their Soviet fellow tribesmen to the police, and the Soviet program came to a halt. The fathers of a great many Afghan Tadjiks, Uzbeks, and Turcomans in northern Afghanistan had been *basmachi* rebels. The tribesmen knew well the brutality of Soviet "benevolence" toward their Moslem brothers to the north. So many refugees, in fact, had been crossing the Oxus into Afghanistan that after World War II the Soviets turned the border into the perimeter of a concentration camp, replete with barbed wire, overlapping searchlights, and machine gun-equipped watchtowers.

Nonetheless, the Afghan government maintained its nonalignment policy of *bi-tarafi,* accompanied by increased aid from both East and West. A slow course of modernization and political liberalization (eventually with political parties and a bicameral parliament) continued through the '50s and '60s. Then, on July 17, 1973, came the beginning of the end. Mohammad Daoud Khan, first cousin and brother-in-law to King Zahir Shah (still in power after 40 years), and prime minister from 1953 to 1963, staged a coup, overthrew the king, and declared himself founder and president of the Republic of Afghanistan.

While most Afghans paid little attention to politics in Kabul as long as their village life was left pretty much alone, two Soviet-inspired, Kabul-based parties—Khalq ("masses"), founded by Nur Mohammad Taraki in 1965, and Parcham ("flag"), founded by Babrak Karmal—began organizing and agitating in earnest, particularly among the students and government civil service in Kabul. Though the two parties were violently bitter rivals, Moscow forced them to join forces in 1977. In April 1978 a key Parchami leader was murdered (possibly by the KGB, the Soviet spy force), sparking demonstrations in the capital. Taraki's lieutenant, Hafizullah Amin, led a coup in which President Daoud and his family were killed and Taraki was installed as president of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan.

As Taraki's Khalq party consolidated its power, Parchami leaders, including Karmal, were first banished to East European ambassadorships, then recalled—whereupon, it is reported, they all fled to Moscow. The Taraki regime loudly proclaimed itself a defender of Islam and denied being Communist. But its Marxist-Leninist rhetoric on Radio Afghan was recognized throughout the country as indistinguishable from that of Radio Tashkent and Radio Moscow, and revolts started breaking out.

By March 1979, rebels in the province of Nuristan controlled the upper Kunar Valley and had declared an *azad* ("free") Nuristan. By the summer, spontaneous uprisings were occurring in all 29 provinces of the country, and what are now the six major mujaheddin organizations had emerged: *Mohaz,* led by Pir Sayyid Gailani; *Nijat,* led by Sigbatullah Mojadeddi; the *Hezbis,* originally formed by Gulbuddin Hekmaktyar in Pakistan after Daoud's coup in 1973; Burhanuddin Rabani's *Jamiat; Harakat,* of Mohammad Mohamaddi; and a breakaway group of Hezbis led by Maulavi Younis Khalis. (These are the common terms for the main mujaheddin groups, all presently headquartered in Peshawar, Pakistan.)

Meanwhile, Hafizullah Amin (now first minister under President Taraki) had taken charge of putting down the rebels with a demoniacal ferocity. By September 1979, more than half of the 92,000-man Afghan army had either deserted or joined the mujaheddin. Taraki met with Soviet premier Leonid Brezhnev in Moscow; Brezhnev reportedly urged him to get rid of Amin. On or about September 14, there was a shoot-out in Taraki's office—but when the smoke cleared, it was Taraki, not Amin, with the bullet holes in his chest.

A brutal Marxist ideologue, Amin—educated in America at Columbia and the University of Wisconsin—responded to the rapidly deteriorating situation with increased ruthlessness, torture, and revolutionary cant. The Soviets now faced an extremely dangerous situation: the clear possibility of victory by the mujaheddin and the subsequent emergence of a virulently anti-Soviet government on their borders. The specter of such a government

sparking an anti-Communist Islamic fire among Moslems in the Soviet Union—at close to 50 million, the fifth-largest Moslem population in the world—many of whom are blood relations with Afghans, was a nightmare Moscow could not allow to become a reality.

Events had not gone the way the Soviets had planned. They wanted to control Afghanistan via their Afghan proxies and slowly bring it within their orbit. But the mujaheddin uprisings against the Soviet-backed government put the Soviets in a box, and they had to make a decision. With Jimmy Carter in the White House, they predicted that they had nothing to fear from the United States. So they decided to bite the bullet. On Christmas Day of 1979, 5,000 Soviet troops invaded the sovereign country of Afghanistan, with 85,000 more Soviet troops arriving within a month. A special commando team under the orders of Soviet General Viktor Paputin shot its way into the presidential palace in Kabul and executed Amin. Babrak Karmal, the leader of the Parcham communist party in exile in Moscow, was installed as the puppet "president" of the newest colony of the Soviet empire.

Today, although estimates vary, there are at least 130,000 Soviet troops occupying Afghanistan, perhaps as many as 200,000. (Experts closest to the scene in Afghanistan—such as *Christian Science Monitor* correspondent Edward Girardet, BBC reporter Peter Jouvenal, Soviet-military-specialist David Isby, and every mujahed leader in Peshawar, Pakistan—are convinced that the number of 105,000 that the Western press keeps quoting from NATO analysts, who have extrapolated that figure from official Soviet reports, is absurdly low.) While there are as many as a quarter of a million mujaheddin up against the Soviets, perhaps no more than 90,000 of them are actually fighting at any given moment, because they are short of arms and ammunition.

I had been to Afghanistan twice before, in 1963 and again in 1973, just after Daoud's coup. In wandering alone around the country, I was taken with its peaceful and exotic beauty, from hidden valleys and villages in the glacier-strewn Hindu Kush and Koh-i-Baba mountains to the colossal statues of Buddha carved 1,000 years ago into the cliffs of Bamian and the lapis-lazuli blue lakes at Band-i-mir. Once I hitched a ride with some US embassy people from Kabul through the Khyber Pass to Peshawar, Pakistan. As we were trundling down the paved highway toward Jalalabad and the Khyber, I remember looking off to the right and marveling at the brooding mountains that seemed to extend endlessly into the barrenness. I could not have known then that someday, to get back into Afghanistan, I would have to walk across those desolate mountains.

To enter Afghanistan with the mujaheddin you start in Peshawar. Its streets are a spectacle straight out of an Indiana Jones movie: ancient buses encrusted with sheets of embossed chrome; lurching British-made Bedford trucks bedecked with multicolor painted images and ornately carved wooden doors; horse carts with veiled passengers; hand-pushed flat-bed carts loaded with goods and produce; water buffalo hauling oxcarts piled high with hay; butchers lugging around freshly slaughtered sheep or cattle carcasses; a maelstrom of people from every tribe in Central Asia, many with bandoliers and old muskets or carbines slung over their shoulders; countless shops and tiny stalls stocked with everything imaginable, from household goods to hashish; swirling dust, heat and humidity of Hadean proportions—and at least 15 billion flies.

You charge through all of this in a rickshaw motor-scooter taxi gussied up with stripes of colored tape, dozens of bells and tiny mirrors, glittering tassles, kaleidoscopic designs in a rainbow of colors made with patches of plastic, and gaudy paintings on the back—mostly of some crazed, snarling, heavily-mustachioed, gun-waving bandit type so popular in Pakistani action flicks. Every rickshaw driver in Peshawar knows where the mujaheddin headquarters are.

After you have established your credibility with the wary guerrillas, you are invited to "go inside" Afghanistan. After a trip to the bazaar to select appropriate Afghan garb to wear, and a last meal of chicken shashlik at Dean's Hotel, a nondescript jeep comes by to pick you up. Inside the jeep are the three deadliest looking men you have ever seen in your life. They are your guides. They will take you secretly across the border so that you can see for yourself what it is like to fight a holy war against the army of the Soviet Union.

I went inside the first time with mujaheddin from Pir Sayyhid Gailani's Mohaz organization. We drove through the arms-smuggling depot of Darra, over the Kohat Pass, and sneaked past numerous Pakistani police check points to arrive some nine hours later at Wana, a mudhole in the lost deserts of southern Waziristan, still inside Pakistan but close to the Afghan border. The jeep left us off to return to Peshawar, so the next morning we hitched a ride in the back of a truck, filled with sacks of wheat and scowling Waziri tribesmen, that went far up into the mountains and dropped us off at a mujahed encampment near the Pakistani border town of Angur Ada.

Commander Maulavi Hazrat Shah immediately bade us welcome (although he had no advance warning of our arrival), *nan* (Afghan bread) and green tea were quickly proffered, and within an hour a captured Soviet URAL truck was gassed up and at our disposal. With a load of flour and the maulavi (an Islamic title indicating a rank within the faith) and a contingent of his men in the back, we were off.

I had not expected such luxury—driving into Afghanistan in a captured Soviet truck is definitely classy. I also was not prepared for the *complete* lack of any government presence—Pakistani, Afghan, or Soviet—at the border. The mountains drop away at Angur Ada's feet into the Barmal Valley of Afghanistan. While the town is some yards inside Pakistan, as we drove out of it and down into the valley, there was simply no indication of a border of any kind.

We drove hundreds of kilometers inside Afghanistan—through dry but fertile valleys covered with ploughed fields and corn fields and dotted with well-tended adobe fortress-homes and castles. I even saw a small Ford tractor or two. We slept and ate at *chaisanas* (tea houses), drove up to and beyond the Soviet garrison at Urgun, stayed at villages and mujahed encampments nestled in pine and cedar forests, and ran into thousands of armed mujaheddin, in groups of a half-dozen to several hundred.

What I saw in Paktia province is mirrored throughout the rest of the country: *there is no central government presence in Afghanistan.* The uniformed government officials that were a familiar sight during my 1963 and 1973 travels through Afghanistan are today nowhere to be seen. The Soviets and whatever Afghan army recruits they can round up at any given time before they desert (around 30,000) exert daytime control over most portions of the major cities, such as Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif, Kandahar, Ghazni, and Kabul. Elsewhere they are hunkered down in isolated and surrounded garrisons like Urgun or Jaji or at big air bases like Bagram and Shindand. The mujaheddin control 90 percent of the countryside, in which there is only traditional tribal government.

The Soviets, however, control 90 percent of the air. Though the mujaheddin desperately need money, food, medicines, vitamins, shoes, doctors and paramedics, walkie-talkies, binoculars, canteens, knapsacks, light arms, and ammunition, more than anything else they need antiaircraft weapons. They need tens of thousands of Kalashnikovs, grenade launchers, mines, and millions of rounds of ammo. But what is absolutely vital is a massive supply, in the thousands, of antiaircraft weapons to take the Soviet gunships out of the air.

The Soviet MI-24 HIND helicopter gunship (depicted on the cover of this issue) has four rocket pods, each with 32 rockets, a laser-sighted rotary cannon firing 1,000 rounds a minute, and four napalm or high-explosive bombs. It is heavily armored, particularly on its belly. The three men of its crew sit in a bulletproof titanium cockpit. It is one of the most lethal war machines on earth, capable of annihilating an entire village in a matter of seconds. Except for those rare places where there are enough antiaircraft guns, as in Jaji, Afghans are at the mercy of the death machines.

This fact was bitterly brought home to me when I learned that a village I had stayed at in the mountains above Urgun—where I had played with the local children and given them a pocket frisbee—was later wiped out by a gunship attack. Most, if not all, of the children whose picture you see on page 28 were killed.

The second time I went inside I was with a group of mujaheddin from the Harakat and Jamiat organizations. Again there was the jeep ride past the infuriating Pak check points. But this time we went up the Kurram Valley to the Pakistani border town of Tara Mangal, the principal point from which arms are smuggled to mujaheddin in central and northern Afghanistan.

(I learned from mujahed sources that Arab and Pakistani connections in China purchase matériel at or near cost, mostly Chinese copies of Soviet weapons. [The Chinese government also donates some arms to the mujaheddin.] Chinese trucks take the arms over the China-Pakistan border, via the Karakorum Highway, down to the city of Lahore. There the wares are transferred to Pak trucks and hauled up to Tara Mangal, where they are distributed. At Tara Mangal I saw three huge truckloads of arms uncrated and put on the backs of mules and donkeys for the trip into Afghanistan.)

No fancy captured truck now—this time it was one foot after the other. At the actual border pass, a lone Pak policeman was tolerated by the tribesmen flowing back and forth. He bothered no one. Again, on the Afghan side there was no government presence, just the burned-out hulk of a Soviet armored personnel carrier—evidence of a failed Soviet assault.

The Pak-Afghan border, laid down by the British in 1893 as the famous "Durand Line," cuts arbitrarily across Pathan and other tribal areas and has always been a sieve. The Pakistan government exercises only nominal control in the whole border area, the Soviet-Afghan "government" none at all on "their" side. At only two points along the entire border do and can the Soviets maintain a presence: where the Quetta-Kandahar road crosses the border at Spin Buldak, in southeast Afghanistan, and at the Khyber Pass itself.

Afghanistan is not flat. The 9,000-foot border pass was only the beginning. We hiked up one crag and down into a gorge or valley, then up again, down again, over and over again. There were five of us: Hossein, a mujahed who acted as my interpreter; Commander Sangeen; Sangeen's two lieutenants, Gul-jan and Rahin-jan; and myself. We were on a main trail from Kabul and points north, and groups of refugees were continually going by us, fleeing into Pakistan. At every *chaisana,* there were mujaheddin from various guerrilla groups, drinking tea and eating *nan* amidst the swarms of flies, on their way to their respective battle fronts.

Throughout this trek, one experience was depressingly repeated. Upon coming to the top of a pass, a beautiful valley would appear beneath us: green terraces of corn, orchards and shade trees, picturesque villages—a picture post card. That was at a distance. Close up, we would discover instead a ghost valley: everything shattered and destroyed by the *Shuravi* (the mujaheddin's word for the Soviet invaders); skeletons of homes and villages bombed out; fields turning to weeds; untended orchards of mulberry, apple, and apricot trees. The villages were abandoned and uninhabited save for a few remaining families, especially old people, and an occasional tea house.

As we neared Kabul, I got used to the recurring sound of helicopters flying between Kabul and Jalalabad. My escorts pointed out that there was no danger—the choppers flew very high to avoid Dashaka fire. Once, we were crossing a particularly barren spot when two MiG jet fighters came screaming over the hills in front of us. Luckily, it was late in the day and the jets kept going, their Soviet pilots headed, no doubt, for a cool beer at the Kabul air base.

Finally we reached the encampment of a famous commander in the Kabul area, Wali Khan. Wali Khan, who is with the Mohaz and Harakat mujaheddin, had managed to acquire an official blue Afghan government truck. After an extension of traditional Afghan hospitality with tea and *nan*, Wali Khan asked me, "How would you like to see Kabul?" Soon I was bouncing along the dusty Sorubi power-dam road that leads to the capital, with a contingent of Wali Khan's men dressed in captured Afghan army uniforms.

We entered Kabul Valley and stopped on the road so that I could view a Soviet garrison not far away. Then we drove to the outskirts of Kabul and parked on a slight rise overlooking the most infamous place in Afghanistan, Pol-i-Charky prison, holding some 22,000 political prisoners. Before the curfew checkpoints started appearing we hot-footed it back to the safety of Wali Khan's camp.

Wali Khan had gotten word from his spies in Kabul that the Soviets were planning an offensive in his area, so I spent the next week with him traveling by truck, foot, and horseback, as he coordinated the preparations at a number of mujahed camps and positions.

Intelligent and educated (at Kabul University), Wali Khan possesses a wisdom that is beyond his 34 years. Joining the *jihad* during Taraki's reign, he aligned himself with Gailani's Mohaz group of mujaheddin because Gailani, in addition to being passionately anti-Soviet and anti-Communist (and his family revered as descending from the family of the prophet Mohammed), is a true Afghan nationalist.

The heads of Mohaz, Harakat, and Nijat, while all devout and respected Islamic leaders, have a much stronger element of Afghan nationalism in their motivation for fighting the *Shuravi* than do the leaders of the Jamiat, Younis Khalis, and Hezb groups of mujaheddin, who are motivated mostly by purely religious reasons.

This is why the Western media have dubbed the first three groups "moderates," the latter three "fundamentalists." Nonetheless, the rivalry that existed between them has rapidly been giving way to an increased cooperation—at least inside. In fact, those mujaheddin actually fighting inside Afghanistan are viewing the political organizations in Peshawar as increasingly irrelevant. More and more, mujaheddin of whatever affiliation—Mohaz, Jamiat, etc.—are rallying around particular regional commanders who have proven their capacity to lead and fight.

The most famous of all these regional commanders is the Jamiat mujahed Ahmad Shah Massoud, operating in the Panjsher Valley, north of Kabul. His record of repulsing seven Soviet offensives is unmatched. But as brilliant and capable as Massoud is, I was to learn that the *jihad* has produced others of almost equal ability: Zabiullah in Balkh, Mohammed Ismail in Herat, Amin Wardak in Wardak, Qali Baba in Ghazni, Jalal-ud-Din in Ningrahar and northern Paktia, Shaf-i-Ollah in the Koh-i-Safi between Kabul and Panjsher, Abdul Haq and Wali Khan in Kabul.

As these and other commanders strengthen their personal leadership, their affiliations with the various mujaheddin organizations are becoming more and more tenuous. The fly in the cooperative ointment, however, remains the Hezbis, led by Gulbiddin Hekmaktyar. Virtually all the fighting between groups of mujaheddin reported in the Western media is between the Hezbis and others.

An interview with the notorious Gulbiddin is an intense experience. Slender, about five-seven in height, and soft-spoken, he is smooth and articulate. He sees himself and his followers as the only true holy warriors. Those who don't join him, he claims, are traitors to the *jihad.* Gulbiddin is an admirer of the Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran (although, like the majority of Afghans, Gulbiddin is Sunni Moslem and could never be actually affiliated with the Shiite Khomeini). And like the Iranian ruler, Gulbiddin sees Western culture and values (including those of democracy) as social poison and America as the Great Satan of the world. He is an Islamic fanatic intent on establishing an Islamic theocracy (a "pure" Islam, as he puts it) in Afghanistan.

At one time, Gulbiddin's Hezbis were the strongest of all mujahed groups. But many Hezbis inside Afghanistan are refusing to fight other mujaheddin who won't join them and are instead joining other groups. Most observers I talked to regard Gulbiddin's growing loss of followers and strength as a positive development in the mujaheddin's cause. Yet because Gulbiddin remains an important figure among the political organizations in Peshawar, few will speak out against him for the record.

"Yes, the mujaheddin are coming together more and more now," Commander Wali Khan agreed. "This gives me hope. But what we need now, more than ever, is not simply more weapons and supplies, but *training*—professional military training in strategy, tactics, discipline, and weapons handling. Too many of my men, too many of all mujaheddin, suffer from the delusion that their untrained native fighting ability and faith in Islam will ensure victory. The average mujahed thinks he is naturally born as one of the world's great guerrilla fighters—but the honest truth is that he is a magnificently courageous and fearless amateur.

"Yet we are learning—learning how to better fight the *Shuravi,* learning how to handle modern weapons. Now is the time for professional training and more and better weapons."

"Like Redeyes?" I asked, referring to hand-held, shoulder-launched, heat-seeking missiles.

"Yes! Like Redeyes. With Redeyes and enough antiaircraft machine guns and cannons, we could protect our villages and stop the hemorrhaging of refugees—perhaps even make it safe for many of them to return. We could prevent our harvests from being napalmed. We could attack in the daytime. We could go on the *offensive* against the *Shuravi.* We could starve out most every garrison in the country, as they couldn't be supplied by air. If we could take those gunships out of the air, it would make an indescribable difference, put the *Shuravi* on the ground where we can beat them, make this war so much more costly for them."

I asked Wali Khan his opinion of the Peshawar-based chief military advisor to the Mohaz, Harakat, and Nijat mujaheddin, Brig. Gen. (in the Imperial Afghan Army under King Zahir Shah) Rahmatullah Safi. I had found Safi to be the single most impressive individual I had met among the Afghan freedom fighters.

"Ah…Safi." Wali Khan smiled with warm affection. "Safi is the best. He is also my dear friend. Safi has had commando training in Russia, England, and America. He speaks fluent Russian and knows the mind of the *Shuravi.* He speaks English as well as you do. It is so frustrating for him, you know, that his ideas are difficult to get through to the mujahed leaders, whose backgrounds are in religion, not the military. Further, there is so little money available for him to implement his ideas."

"Are you familiar with his commando training school?"

"Several of my men are attending his school at this moment. His plan to train men to make napalm and bombs out of things you can buy in the Kabul bazaar—and how to make Kabul a very unhealthy place for *Shuravi* officers—could be vital to our struggle. But he has to feed his men on three rupees a day [about 23 cents]. He desperately needs more support. Radio Moscow is constantly saying the mujaheddin are 'bandits' supported by the CIA. We, of course, don't know what a CIA agent looks like and have never seen any support—but I wish it did exist, and some of it could go to Safi."

We hiked up to the area of Jigdalik and spent a day talking to Hassan Khan, a commander with the Harakat mujaheddin, and Anwar, the leader of all mujaheddin in Logar province, to the south and east of Kabul. From high up on a rocky ledge overlooking the valley, I took in the beautiful sight below—pretty villages and green trees and fields. Before the 1979 invasion, more than 2,000 families lived here. Now, there were less than 50.

Hassan Khan and Anwar had just captured an agent of the Karmal government posing as a mujahed named Nasrullah. The Soviets had paid him several thousand dollars (in Afghani rupees) to spy on the guerrillas.

There were several hundred Karmal agents, I was told, among the mujaheddin. (Of course, there are many more mujahed spies among the Karmal army and government.) The Soviets pay these spies well to join the *Khad* (Karmal secret police), my mujahed hosts informed me. But in addition to those spies who do it for the money, there might, I suggested, be educated or semi-educated Afghan youths taken in by Marxist rhetoric or enamored of the power of the Soviet Union and its willingness to use it. They see the Soviet Union as the wave of the future, the mujaheddin as ignorant reactionaries resisting the Soviet attempt to move Afghanistan out of the past, trying to impose a parochial religious tyranny dominated by illiterate fanatic mullahs. Such youths could easily close their eyes to the Soviet barbarism and genocide perpetrated upon their fellow citizens, as many Germans did with the Nazis.

Yes, my mujahed hosts agreed. The Russians are not stupid. They have their propaganda, and Quislings can be found in any society. Thousands of Afghan students are being educated in the Soviet Union—but much of this propagandistic effort is backfiring because of overt Great Russian racism toward Central Asians. The other side of the coin is the high desertion rate in the Karmal (Afghan) army and the Soviets' complete failure to turn it into a reliable fighting force. And while the morale of the mujaheddin remains as high and determined as ever, the morale of the average Soviet soldier is collapsing.

The mujaheddin I spoke to all confirmed the reports I had heard concerning morale among Soviet troops in Afghanistan. The typical Soviet soldier is a conscript and told he is going to Afghanistan to protect the socialist progressive Afghan government and fraternal Soviet-loving Afghan people against murderous, child-raping CIA and Chinese mercenaries and bandits. But when he gets to Afghanistan he never sees a single white- or yellow-skinned mercenary, and every Afghan he meets wants to castrate him.

Amoebic dysentery is pandemic, and diseases like influenza are rampant where he is based. The food is so insufficient that he sometimes must beg for or steal it from half-starved Afghan villagers. He and all his comrades get stoned on hash, obtained by trading with Karmal troops (and raised and sold to them by mujaheddin), as much and as often as they can.

But rebellion against authority is not a characteristic of the Russian psyche. So the conscript rarely is other than meekly obedient to his superior officers—professionals under no illusions, who know that service in Afghanistan will look good in their career records.

Before I left Jigdalik, Anwar and Hassan Khan took Wali Khan and me on a tour of the three Dashaka gun positions overlooking the valley. Before they'd gotten the Dashakas a month earlier, the gunships were flying low, bombing the villages almost every day. The day the mujaheddin acquired and set up their Dashakas, they fired tracer bullets at an attacking gunship and a MiG on a strafing run. Both fled at the sight of the bullets' fluorescent trails, and from that day on there hadn't been any Soviet aircraft in the sky over the whole area of seven villages.

It was with a hope that our paths would cross again that I bid Wali Khan goodbye. As I climbed down off the ledge above Jigdalik, he waved and called out "Mordakum Shuravi" ("Death to the Soviets"). Sangeen, Gul-jan, Rahin-jan, Hossein, and I headed for the battle at Jaji.

It is morning now, sunrise at Jaji. I am peering over a shallow protective trench on the top of a hill overlooking the valley, the rising sun at my back. It is a cloudless day, and the sun is spreading over the crazy quilt of field patches on the valley floor. Men are going out to work their fields, and some sheep are grazing nearby.

The entire valley is reverberating from the sounds of two MiGs and a "Frogfoot" fighter as they fly in from the northwest to make their runs on the mujaheddin positions. The Dashakas are pumping at them from a half-dozen of the 30 emplacements on both valley walls. But the jets are too fast and too high. The valley shudders, the hill I am on with it. Napalm bombs fall with enormous thuds, and the mountains to my left burst into spurting balls of fire.

The jets fly off to the north, and it is quiet again. A pall of smoke rises over the mountains, and a stream of Dashaka fire rains down on the garrison. I walk with Gulab-jan, subcommander under Adam Khel, overall commander and tribal chief of the valley, down to and across the valley floor to the tiny village of Mir Khel, perched on the edge of the mine field surrounding the garrison. Inside an adobe castle-like home I meet a small group of mujaheddin who are planning a rocket attack on the garrison for that night.

Outside, children are racing around playing hide and seek in the village enclosure. I think of a child, an 8-year-old boy I met at the Red Cross hospital in Peshawar. His name was Nabib, and he told me he had been playing at his village in Afghanistan when a Soviet helicopter flew over and dropped some brightly colored things. He and his playmates rushed over to see what they were. They looked like painted toys—pens, red wagons, birds. Nabib picked one up, and it blew off his hands.

There are few moral issues in this often-confusing world as sharp and clear-cut as Afghanistan. The Afghans—exceptions like Gulbiddin notwithstanding—are not Moslem fanatics. They are a devout people, believing deeply in their religion and the Islamic way of life. They have attacked nobody and are a threat to nobody. They simply want to be left alone. Yet they are being systematically exterminated for the cause of Soviet imperialism.

If you are wondering about now whether the United States and the Saudis and other oil-rich Arab Moslems are helping the mujaheddin, the answer is, they are—but with perverse results. Believe it or not, the US government, through the CIA, gives well over *$100 million a year* to the mujaheddin. The Saudis are giving *another $100 million.* Persian Gulf Arabs and others are kicking in an additional $50 million, for a yearly total of *$250 million.* But the mujaheddin never get it.

The Pakistan government insists that all aid for the mujaheddin be given to it first. So the CIA, and to a lesser extent, the Saudis, never deal directly with the Afghan guerrillas. The Pakistan government is in charge of spending the money and providing the mujaheddin with what it sees fit—with a "small commission" of, I estimate, some 80 percent.

Further, the substantial part of what the Paks do extend to the mujaheddin goes to their former agent, the Moslem fanatic Gulbiddin, and his cohort, "Professor" Sayyaf, the treasurer of the "fundamentalist" coalition in Peshawar. Administrative costs incurred by the mujahed offices in Peshawar somehow manage to soak up much of the available money as well. For many of those "mujahed" functionaries in Pakistan, the good life on easy street in Peshawar's fashionable suburbs is becoming far preferable to dodging bullets in a war-wracked mountain hell-hole.

All told, after all the skimming and graft, little more than 5 percent of the $250 million is actually spent on the mujaheddin inside fighting the Red Army, who desperately lack shoes, food, medicines, and weapons. The precise accuracy of these numbers cannot be firmly established, so to quibble about them is a red herring. What is beyond doubt to every eyewitness of the situation I know is that a lot of money is being given to help the mujaheddin, and the mujaheddin fighting inside are not getting it. In Peshawar today, a Lee Enfield rifle costs $800, a Kalashnikov $1,500, a Dashaka $8,000. For less than $1 million you can buy more than 100 Dashakas and requisite quantities of ammunition. Afghanistan should be flooded with Dashakas—and it isn't.

Embarrassed by this scandal, the CIA has recently launched a major disinformation campaign directed at those in Congress and the Reagan administration who are pressuring it to do a better job with its covert aid program for the Afghans. According to sources in the administration and the intelligence community, whose identities I cannot reveal because of the sensitive nature of the information they have given me, the story of a CIA "pipeline" of arms for the mujaheddin "invisible" to the Pakistanis is a hoax. Media reports of this secret pipeline, such as *Time*'s mid-June article called "Caravans in the Moonlight," have been planted by an embarrassed CIA, my sources told me.

Those mujahed leaders fighting inside Afghanistan who have figured out how the aid system works suggest that their would-be benefactors could bypass the corruption in Pakistan by supplying cash directly to the regional commanders, whose agents can buy supplies. Likewise, arms and ammunition could be airdropped directly to the main regional commanders.

But if the mujaheddin are to succeed in their *jihad,* they will also have to get adequate professional training. Not only would they have to secure sufficient support for Safi, but they would need additional personnel to be trained in a neutral country, who could then return and train more mujaheddin inside.

At some time, too, the mujaheddin will have to grasp that victory for them ultimately lies to the north. In their 50 million fellow Soviet Moslems across the Amu Darya, they have allies of enormous potential. Only when they learn how to bring their *jihad* into Soviet Tadjikistan and Soviet Uzbekistan will the mujaheddin have a bargaining chip worth enough to force the Soviets into a negotiated withdrawal from their country. (See my article "How to Dismantle the Soviet Empire," REASON, Nov. 1983.)

Still, despite the mujaheddin's limited resources, the events in Afghanistan provoke this question: if a bunch of guys in bolt-action rifles and sandals can fight off the Soviet Union, must anyone fear the Red boogeyman any longer? If the Soviets can't defeat the Afghans, could they probably take on, say, 250 million Western Europeans?

Why the Afghans are struggling to turn back the Soviet invaders is made painfully clear by the picture of the little boy with stumps at the end of his arms (on page 29). It was a Soviet-made butterfly bomb that did this. You don't make bombs that look like toys unless you want this to happen. Murdering and terrorizing as many innocent men, women, and children as possible into becoming refugees is the Kremlin's consciously pursued policy in Afghanistan. As you look at this picture, you cannot escape this conclusion: *the Soviets wanted this to happen.* That is the nature of the enemy Afghanistan's holy warriors face.

Jack Wheeler holds a Ph.D. in philosophy.This article is the third in a series on Third World anti-Soviet insurgencies (reports on UNITA in Angola and the Contras in Nicaragua appeared in the April and June-July issues, respectively). In August, Jack Wheeler returned to Afghanistan, once again to "go inside" with the mujaheddin. This article is a project of the Reason Foundation Investigative Journalism Fund.

The New Anticolonialism

It is perhaps not surprising that, in the struggle to throw off Western colonialism, so many of the Third World's "national liberation movements" have embraced the anticapitalist, anti-Western ideology of Marxist-Leninist socialism. And they often have had the backing—military, economic, and rhetorical—of the Soviet Union.

Today, however, this association is rapidly becoming a relic of the past. What is emerging might be called "the second stage" of post–World War II anticolonialism.

To investigate this new phenomenon of anti-Soviet liberation movements, I went to southwestern Asia, Africa, and Central America, going clandestinely into freedom fighters' territory. Each case was different, but I found a growing rejection of Soviet imperialism throughout the Third World.

There are wars of liberation in eight parts of the Soviet Empire right now—in Nicaragua, Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Afghanistan, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The emergence of these anti-Soviet armed insurgencies points to the end of Soviet expansionism and the start of its contraction. More and more of the Third World is realizing that Soviet Marxism is a one-way ticket to oppression and poverty. The Soviet Empire may, at last, be on the verge of breaking up.

—J W.

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